

‘Young People’s Ideas about Time and Space’

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ABSTRACT: Suggesting that a focus on young people can be regarded as a kind of litmus test of the cultural processes operating in a society, this article looks at their ideas about time and space in the context of exploring the extent to which Ireland is a post late modern society. Drawing on a stratified one in ten random sample of approximately 34,000 texts written by 10-12 year olds and 15-17 year olds, the article explores the importance and meaning of the local, ideas about time (including generational positioning), adult concepts of time, spatial time, and ideas about the future. The method of analysis is both quantitative and qualitative, with variation being explored in terms of gender and age.

BINTRODUCTION

Time and space have been depicted as central to an understanding of childhood and indeed as inseparable in many ways (Kovarik, 1994; Ennew, 1994; Morgan 1996). James and Prout (1990:216) suggested ‘that the social construction of time may be crucial to the study of childhood’ – both in the sense of thinking about childhood as an institution and thinking about the lives of children themselves. Qvortrup (1994) linked issues related to time with those of space in children’s lives. There is a growing interest within sociology in the spatiality of childhood (James *et al.* 1998) in a context where it is increasingly recognised that it is simplistic to juxtapose the global and the local (Holloway and Valentine 2000; Giddens 1991; Bennett 2000). A post or late modern society is seen as one where time and space are compressed so that new kinds of relationships are possible. Indeed one of the features of such modernity is that time horizons contract: ‘*history shrinks to the (eternal) present*, and everything revolves around the axis of one’s personal ego and personal life’ (Beck 1992:135). At the same time, space contracts and the world becomes a global village.

There has been a great deal of discussion about the nature of modernity and post or late modernity and the degree to which Ireland is/is not a post or late modern society (Tovey and Share 2000; Slater 1998). A study focusing on young people’s own accounts is valuable in itself. In addition, however, the issues that are central to

discussions of post or late modernity are those that also underpin the lives of young people. Such lives can be seen as exemplifying at an archetypical level issues related to the project of identity; consumption; relationships and, particularly, time and space (Giddens 1991; Bauman 1991, 1997). Thus, a focus on young people is seen as particularly appropriate, both in itself and as a kind of litmus test of the extent and nature of the wider cultural processes operating in a society which has experienced very rapid social, economic and cultural change over the past thirty years. For example, whereas roughly two thirds of young married women are in paid employment now, the Marriage Bar was in existence in the early 1970s.¹ The extent and nature of family change has been equally dramatic, with sharp declines in family size and dramatic increases in lone parents, and in dual-earner couples (O'Connor, 1998; 2,000). Economically, the past thirty years have been an extremely volatile period, with very high inflation in the 1970s, economic depression and high levels of emigration in the 1980s and, in the 1990s, high rates of economic growth, a reversal of emigration patterns, and the emergence of the Celtic Tiger (O'Connell 1999). These social and economic changes have been accompanied by rapid cultural change (Peillon and Slater 1998; and Slater and Peillon 2000; Tovey and Share 2000). However, with a small number of notable exceptions, the impact of such experiences on young people has not been studied. Nic Ghiolla Phádraig (1991) and Cleary *et al.* (2001) were the first to attempt to provide a comprehensive overview of the experiences and perceptions of children in Ireland. This article is very much in this tradition although, in its focus on young people's perceptions of time and space, it exemplifies concerns which are common in the wider European context which, with a small number of exceptions (e.g Lodge and Flynn 2001), have been little discussed in Ireland.

This paper is based on material provided by Irish young people in Fifth class in First Level (typically aged 10 – 12 years) and in Transition Year in Second Level (typically aged 14 – 17 years) when they were asked in a school context to write a single page about themselves and their lives as part of a Millennium project. These young people were born in the economically depressed 1980s (1982 – 1985 and 1987 – 1989 respectively) but since their pre-teens have been exposed to what has become known as the Celtic Tiger (O'Connell 1999). In this article, we will look first at discourses involving space. Secondly, we will explore the discourses involving the temporal structuring of their lives. Thirdly we will look at the temporal and spatial

aspects of their ideas about the future. Reference will be made to the way in which these vary by age and gender. However, the impact of these variables in the context of school location and class indicators (such as the disadvantaged status of the school) lies beyond the scope of this paper.

BDESCRIPTION OF SAMPLE AND METHODOLOGY

It has been suggested that 'Children are the best resource for understanding childhood' (Corsaro 1997: 103). Texts written by them are the data used in this study. In 1999, a total of 3,658 schools, which included 3,044 First Level Schools, 486 Second Level Schools and 128 Special Schools/classes (Kelly 1999) were invited to participate in the study. Participation involved each child in Fifth Class in First Level, and in Transition Year in Second level, being invited to write a page about themselves and their lives. Half (51 per cent) of these schools returned texts: 53 per cent of First Level Schools; 43 per cent of Second Level, and 29 per cent of Special Schools (a small number of schools who returned texts were impossible to classify since their names did not match those on the Department of Education lists). A stratified random one in ten sample of the children's texts was selected, providing a total of 4,100 individual pieces of text (from a total of 33,829): the valid number of sheets being approx 4,075. Of these, one per cent were written in Irish, the remainder being in English.

The overwhelming majority of the texts (85 per cent) were produced by those in Fifth Class in First Level; 14 per cent by Transition Year students in Second Level and less than 1 per cent by mentally handicapped young people in special classes or schools. The low proportion of texts returned by Transition Year students is striking. It is difficult to interpret this. However, it may reflect the perception of the exercise as 'childish' – an interpretation that seems plausible in view of the way in which it was presented to schools (through a video and documentation).

Based on the data available, amongst the Transition Year students, the majority of the texts were received from students in non-fee paying Secondary Schools (ten per cent); with three per cent from VEC Second Level Schools and the remainder from Secondary Fee paying schools. The vast majority (92 per cent) of the contributors were attending Roman Catholic schools with small proportions attending schools managed by one of the Protestant denominations (four per cent) or multi-

denominational schools (four per cent). Over three fifths of the sample (61 per cent) were attending co-educational schools, with 25 per cent attending single sex girls schools, and 14 per cent attending single sex boys schools. The schools were fairly evenly spread between rural areas (23 per cent); towns (41 per cent), and cities – including suburbia (36 per cent). Although the majority (85 per cent) of the valid sampled texts were produced by children aged 10 – 12 years, texts written by girls accounted for roughly half (56 per cent) of all the sample texts. Older girls were marginally more likely to participate than older boys (17 per cent from girls aged 14 – 17 years versus 13 per cent for boys of the same age).

The method of analysis was both quantitative and qualitative. A preliminary selection of sheets was used to identify the main themes to be explored and to form the basis of the coding frame used in the quantitative analysis of the 4,075 valid sheets. The coding frame assessed the absence or presence of a number of themes including family, friends, school, descriptions of self, hobbies or activities, roots or heritage, and the future.² In addition, a thematic qualitative analysis was also undertaken of a random selection of 1,200 sheets by two of the other researchers. Working initially in the context of the categories identified in the quantitative analysis, they identified themes and sub-themes and transcribed quotations to illustrate these. Locality was identified as such a theme. The qualitative data were also used to explore neglected themes in a more subtle way than was possible using the quantitative data. Thus time was not initially included but emerged from a re-examination of the material drawing on sub-themes **such as those** related to moves, personal history, ideas about the future.

The data from this study is limited in several ways. Firstly, it was produced within a classroom situation; a typical solution to an attempt to centre the focus on children and their experiences (James and Prout 1996). Inevitably, since it was written within this context, it potentially reflects the constraints of that situation. However, the documentation sent to schools stressed that this was not a competition, so that it seems improbable that schools pre-selected texts in any way. The stratified one in ten sample drawn to form the basis of this study reflected those sent in by the schools – stratification was introduced simply to ensure that small schools/classes were represented. There was some suggestion in the younger children's qualitative material that some class groups had collectively planned the writing of the texts in advance. To attempt however to exclude those sheets could have discriminated against the bigger

schools, since such bigger samples enabled one to see this pattern. Thus, the inability to assess the direct/indirect influence of the teacher must be seen as one of the limitations of the data. Finally, the contributors were not required to give personal information other than their names and classes so that the number of independent variables is limited.

The ethical issues **involved in** conducting research with or on children have only begun to be given the attention they deserve in recent years (Alderson 1995; Denscombe and Aubrook 1992; James *et al.* 1998; Morrow 1998). This material came from an initiative aimed at involving young people in Millennium celebrations, and providing an account of their lives for future generations. Permission to use the data was obtained from the Department of Education and the Chair of the Millennium Committee who had initiated the collection of the data, and who had included a reference to the use of such data for research purposes in the material sent to schools. However, the specific permission of the young people involved was not sought. This flies in the face of an acknowledgement of young people's rights and inevitably raises issues of informed consent (Morrow and Richards 1995; James *et al.* 1998). These considerations led to the decision not to use identifying information, local or school referents in the case of individual quotations. However, it is obvious that there are wider ethical issues involved. Nevertheless, given an increasing awareness of the importance of children's perspectives both politically (National Children's Strategy 2000) and in the wider sociological context (Cleary *et al.* 2001; Lynch 1999; James and Prout 1990; Brannen and O'Brien 1996), the data set was seen as providing a unique opportunity, and one which was compatible with the impetus behind the initial compilation of the data (viz the compilation of an informative public document).

BSPATIAL DIMENSION: REFERENCES TO THE LOCAL AND DISCOURSES INVOLVING SPACE

It is not clear how important the local area is to young people in contemporary Ireland (Tovey and Share 2000). However, insofar as Ireland is seen as an increasingly globalised, post or late modern society, one might expect it to have little importance. Although the movement of cultural artefacts and practices across boundaries has been widely accepted as an aspect of globalisation, it is increasingly recognised that global commodities are reworked by local audiences so that the local remains a key element in the construction of meaning and identity (see, for example, Bennett 2000). It is also

recognised that the meaning of local may vary in terms of actual spatial referents (from the immediate neighbourhood to the nation) as well as in terms of its broader cultural content (as a ‘community’, a social problem, a place free from adult supervision). James *et al.* (1998: 39) argued that ‘social space is never a merely neutral location’. Thus, every location has particular social, cultural and aesthetic experiences. Indeed, it has been increasingly noted that it is useful to see the ‘local’ not simply as a fixed spatial area, but as ‘a series of discourses which involve picturing the local and one’s relation to it’ (Bennett 2000: 63).

In the quantitative analysis, references to local area (defined as village, town, area) were recorded while the existence of socially constructed discourses were explored through qualitative analysis. It emerged that, to a degree to which one might not perhaps expect, these young people located themselves very much in a local area. Thus, two thirds of the total sample (63 per cent) referred to such an area. There was no difference between boys and girls in this respect (64 per cent and 63 per cent respectively). This contrasts with the pattern as regards gender differences in the use of playground space in Lodge and Flynn’s (2001) study – although even there it was noted that gender differentiated trends as regards space only emerged under particular conditions, that is where space was limited and an adult presence absent. There were age differences in the present study, with the younger children being very much more likely than the older ones to refer to their locality (67 per cent of the 10 – 12 year olds compared with 40 per cent of the 14 – 17 year olds). This trend arguably reflects the narrower spatial boundaries in the lives of younger children.

It has been suggested that in Western society childhood is seen as being more and more confined to the domestic area, partly driven by concerns about children’s safety, and partly by concerns about their unruliness (Holloway and Valentine 2000; James *et al.* 1998; Ennew 1994). Again, rather surprisingly, this was not the picture which emerged from the qualitative study. Thus, for the younger children in rural areas, the fields around them were seen as very much part of their play areas: *In Heartlawn there would be robbed cars and it was grate (sic)* (Tracey, Fifth Class, First Level). The city provided other kinds of play opportunities: *I live in the country. It is realy (sic) peaceful. I love cycling up the road and sit (sic) under a tree* (Cathal, Fifth Class, First Level).

These observations strongly suggested that, for these children, as for example, for Norwegian children (Ennew 1994), there were spaces in both the urban and rural areas that were not under the control of adults. However, as one might expect some young people were (also) interested in more structured activities, which were likely to involve an adult presence: *We have playgrounds and swimming pools and fun factories and football, tennis, rugby, soccer, gymnastics Heaven is on earth in Dublin* (Nicola, Fifth Class, First Level). In some cases it was the absence of these facilities that was commented on: *Around here ... sports facilities are very rare and nobody gets to do anything but hang around the streets* (Robert, Transition Year, Second Level).

In looking at the content and tone of their references to their local area, it was possible to identify discourses other than those relating to play opportunities. Thus, there was a very striking appreciation of natural beauty in many of the young people's texts. This did not appear to vary by age or gender. However, the tone sometimes suggested that the physical world had been turned into a commodity or product. The physical world as such a commodity 'can be purchased and consumed by ... anyone who enjoys gazing at and enjoying in a detached way signs of the lives of others' (Tovey and Share 2000: 464). There was a strong suggestion that, for these young people, nature had become a 'commodity to be marketed, packaged and sold to visitors', the product including 'scenic landscapes', a 'green unspoilt environment' that will satisfy their demand for 'the distinctive and extraordinary gaze' (Sheerin 1998: 39, 45). This gaze is seen as particularly characteristic of tourists – that most late modern phenomenon – so that it is referred to as 'the tourist gaze':

If you miss Gloria [pseudonym], I guarantee you will regret it for the rest of your living days. If you do blink, you will of course, miss the beautiful, picturesque setting of the village, the natural splendour, the majestic scenery from nature and eternal greenery (James, Transition Year, Second Level).

The possibility that such statements were ironic cannot be excluded, although the context suggested that this was not so. This kind of reference to nature was very different from those who wanted to use nature 'for productive purposes' (Tovey and Share 2000: 464), and who referred to its characteristics and potential as farming

land: *'The climate is extremely bad. Land is very wet and soggy and it is very hard for farmers to farm. At my home we live on a farm'* (Sean, Fifth Class, First Level).

Heritage embracing the built environment and its history was reflected in other accounts – such a focus being stretched to breaking point by the inclusion of housing estates and supermarkets in the concept of heritage. The penetration of the global into such local arenas was also illustrated by the names of the Supermarket chains:

'Locklan [pseudonym] is an interesting place with many housing estates, many shops are also to be found here, such as Spar, Superquinn, Crazyprices and Tesco' (Katie, Fifth Class, First Level).

In Irish sociology and Irish Society, community as a relationship, as well as a place is a strong theme (Tovey and Share 2000), and one which also did not seem to vary by age or gender. Not surprisingly this was reflected in these young people's views of their local area (town, village, area). In some cases it seemed to reflect a 'rhetoric of community' and an idealisation of social ties: *'It is the strong sense of community that makes Gloria [pseudonym] the wonderful place it is now and has been down through the ages'* (James, Transition Year, Second Level). In other cases, however, the perceived reality of community ties was described in terms of very real current social patterns: *'the residents of Clondoon [pseudonym] do up a sports day and a B.B.Q. and Santa comes around the houses every year'* (Linda, Fifth Class, First Level). There were occasional references to the 'socially problematic' character of the area they lived in, indicating that the young people had absorbed this depiction and/or had direct experiences of social problems:

The area I live in ... has a lot of problems such as drugs, crime and violence. There are a lot of drug abusers in my area. The main drug in our area is probably cannabis, heroin and e The violence in the area is big also, people do be in different gangs and don't blend with one another. This ... causes gang fights between people which involves bars, sticks and in some cases guns (Noel, Transition Year, Second Level).

It was clear from the qualitative analysis that (as in Bennett's 2000 study) for some young people, the relevant geographical area was much wider than the local area. Thus, they focused on Ireland, in what can best be described as an orgy of pride:

Some of the best schools in Europe. There's some very good scenery and bangs (sic) like The Corrs and Boyzone' (Danielle, Fifth Class, First Level).

Even the Irish soccer team managed by Mick Mc Carthy is considered one of the best in Europe. We are even considered one of the twentieth century's greatest countries as far as literature is concerned with writers like James Joyce (Vincent, Transition Year, Second Level).

Furthermore, because of their own geographical mobility, for a very small minority of young people, the local embraced widely dispersed areas. Three per cent of the total sample referred to moves between continents or countries, for example moving from US; Italy or the UK to Ireland. Kelly compared the difference with New York: *'its (sic) peaceful and quiet compared to New York. ... Now I have loads of friends and a good education. I have a dog, a puppy, a cat, a kitten and a bird'* (Kelly, Fifth Class, First Level). For some, the moves were more disruptive. Thus, for example, Jenny (Transition Year, Second Level), had moved from Cork to California and back again and was now about to return to California: *'We have not settled. Things have changed in Ireland too much and my parents find it hard to settle in their jobs and I find schools different and difficult.'* Spatial mobility was also sometimes associated with 'breaks' in the family (whether by death, separation/divorce: experienced by seven per cent of the total sample): *'He (Dad) doesn't live with me. He lives in ... with his other wife. I live with my Granny and Grandad and my Mam'* (Mary, Fifth Class, First Level).

In summary then, it was clear that the local was a very salient element insofar as 63 per cent of these young people referred to their local village, town or area. In the quantitative analysis, references to the local varied by age but not by gender. In the qualitative analysis a number of discourses about the locality were identified – but these did not appear to vary either by age or gender. Such discourses reflected ideas about recreational opportunities, a 'tourist gaze', a concern with farming production, and the perceived existence of community. It was also clear that the salient unit for some young people was much wider, that is Ireland. For a small minority of the young people, spatial moves of various kinds in their home base had occurred. Some of these being associated with family break-up. Overall, however, the local rootedness of these young people was striking. Thus, insofar as a 'contraction of space', and a

concern with the global rather than the local is indicative of post or late modernity, the pattern emerging amongst these young people suggests that Ireland is not a post or late modern society.

BTEMPORAL DISCOURSES INVOLVING THE STRUCTURING OF THEIR LIFE COURSE

Children are typically acutely aware of their chronological ages, but ‘time is no longer simply seen as that shown on a clock, but as something which is socially perceived, constructed, refracted and implicated in complex and various ways.’ (Walby 1997: 8). In this section we will explore discourses involving aspects of their own life course, the depth of their generational positioning, their sense of themselves as an age cohort, the existence of an ‘adult concept of time’ (including ‘no time’), and spatial time (Morgan 1996). With very few exceptions, these discourses did not appear to vary by age or gender either.

In terms of the individual life course, human time can be described simply in terms of chronological age. This was virtually universal amongst these children: *‘I was born on[date]. Since then I have grown into what I am today, a mature fun loving teenager not afraid to speak his mind or voice his opinions. The period between these two dates has been my life’* (Ronan, Transition Year, Second Level). At an even more basic level, time in the individual life course is structured in terms of birth and death. In the quantitative analysis, just over one in five of these young people (22 per cent) referred to their birth. Girls were marginally more likely to refer to their birth than boys (24 per cent versus 19 per cent), as were younger children (23 per cent of 10 – 12 year olds mentioned birth compared to 16 per cent of 14 – 17 year olds). Sometimes the reference was a purely factual statement referring to their year or date of birth. In other cases such details were woven into a more complex story about some aspect of their own identity or their subsequent experiences:

The time I was born was 10 past 1 (sic). When I was 3 days old I went home. When I was a baby I had a hoop cofe [sic]. Nirly [sic] every day I had to go for a check up (Michael, Fifth Class, First Level).

I started off as a little seed and was then formed in the womb. Then the day finally came I was born a little girl and I was, well they say I was as good as gold. When I

was three I learned to walk, run and play. I was a very happy child. Today I'm not that happy because I have a new brother (Paul). I have a terrible time. I can't hear the telly because he's shouting. I can't play because he's there talking and I can't go outside without him following me (Laura, Fifth Class, First Level).

Allatt (1996: 135) has highlighted the part played by stories about childhood in forming children's identities and their feeling about whether they were wanted and valued. Such stories also emerged in the qualitative analysis: *My birth. It is the year 1989. I am born. My mother is very distressed over the birth because my mother only had my sister one year ago. I am looking forward to the world* (Ger, Fifth Class, First Level).

The very nature of a millennium implicitly raises questions about an individuals' life span and amongst these young people, there was some awareness of old age: *'I am looking forward to finishing school, getting a job, getting married and growing old during the next Millennium'* (Amanda, Fifth Class, First Level). However, their own mortality eluded some of the younger children: *'By the time you read this I will be 1012 years old'* (Lorraine, Fifth Class, First Level).

It has been suggested that in post or late modern society, a discourse of rootlessness and discontinuity exist (Beck 1992; Bauman 1991 and 1997; Giddens 1991). Such feelings are arguably likely to be related not only to the attachment between the individual and current forms of collective life (such as family; social class; work group); but also to their generational positioning. This was occasionally reflected in a sense of continuity through their grandparents' names or through sporting traditions *'running around on the playing field carrying on the family tradition' [of soccer and football]* (Caitriona, Fifth Class, First Level). References to a discourse related to future generations also emerged in the context of an awareness of a future readership of the texts (noticeably amongst the older girls). Very occasionally this was linked to their own descendants: *'If any of my great, great, great great, great, great, etc etc grandchildren are reading this- Hello'* (Julianne, Transition Year, Second Level).

At a broader level, a historical sense of time involves a sense of oneself as part of an age cohort, with a distinctive life style and attitudes. Typically, in so far as any reference was made to this, their own cohort was juxtaposed with that of the 1960s

(possibly because this was their parents' generation): technology, fashion, music and attitudes being amongst the points of difference highlighted within the context of a view of historical time:

the 90s saw grunge, rap, brit pop before music's eventual downward spiral to inevitable boyband music One common theme is threaded through all 90's music and that is "not giving a damn" ... about human rights, violations in East Timor, the Homeless, our joke of a political system, the terrible education shoved down our throats (Joe, Transition Year, Second Level).

There is a widespread popular perception that children's lives to-day in Ireland as elsewhere (see Ennew 1994; Frones 1994) are much more institutionalised in the sense that organised activity for children with other children now exists in a wide variety of child-oriented activities (summer schools, crèches and so forth). This kind of scheduling of children's activities taking place in spatially disparate locations means that children are subject to strict time discipline and an accelerated tempo which ensures that, even at a young age, children have the experience of having no time. Indeed the whole process of planning and time tabling activities in this situation necessitates the adoption of what Bucher (1990) called adult concepts of time. This kind of discourse was evident in the qualitative study:

My life is packed to every second (sic). On Monday I don't do anything. On Tuesday I go canoeing with the scouts. On Wednesday I go to scouts and G.A.A. training. On Thursday I go rowing. I have nothing on Friday. On Saturday I have boating and that's sailing, canoeing and rowing on Sunday I have canoeing and I have a football match (Darren, Fifth Class, First Level).

It is widely recognised that control is exercised through the structuring of children's lives including the societal regulation of children's attendance at school, between particular ages and at particular hours (James *et al.* 1998; Kovarik 1994). Morgan (1996: 138) has been amongst those identifying spatial time as 'the allocation of times in relation to specific spaces or locales, such as the working day': *'Everyday I wake up at 8.45 . Our school starts at half past 9 and it is over at 3 o'clock'* (Tess, Fifth Class, First Level). An awareness of control within the school setting occasionally

emerged which vividly illustrated the sheer extent of the control that we take for granted:

Sure, everyone has the right to education, but when we exercise that right we loose our right to speak freely, to equality, we cant even urinate at certain times. Therefore we must set our movements to there (sic) timetable and if we are early we must wait in excruciating pain to relieve ourselves (Damien, Transition Year, Second Level).

Overall, then discourses involving time featured in these accounts at five levels. Firstly, as an aspect of their own life course, particularly in terms of their birth, with roughly one in five of these young people referring to their birth. Secondly, it emerged in terms of their generational positioning in a timeframe that extended back to their grandparents and forward to succeeding generations. Thirdly, it emerged as a sense of their historical positioning as 90s young people. Fourthly, from the qualitative descriptions of their lives, the existence of adult concepts of time was reflected in the experience of ‘no time’ and in the experience of tight scheduling. Finally, the concept of spatial time was explored in the context of schooling. There appeared to be little variation by age or gender, although the girls and the younger children were marginally more likely to have a sense of their own life course and generational positioning.

BIDEAS ABOUT THE FUTURE: TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL DIMENSIONS

It has been widely noted that for a considerable period of time, the academic focus on children has been on what they will become, rather than what they are. Perhaps not surprisingly, since they were completing these sheets in the context of the Millennium, 62 per cent of the young people referred to the future in some way (and some made a number of references). Girls were marginally more likely than boys to do this (65 per cent as compared with 59 per cent respectively); younger children were more likely than older ones (63 per cent of the 10 – 12 year olds versus 59 per cent of those aged 14 – 17 years). There was a very striking difference in the accounts of children who wrote entirely present-oriented accounts (focussing particularly on daily activities and preferences) and those whose ideas were much more future oriented – even amongst those in the same school.

Of those who did refer to the future, the most common reference, involving roughly half of the total sample, was to wishes for the future (48 per cent). The most common references were to wishes for their personal future (61 per cent of those referring to the future, and 38 per cent of the total sample, doing this).

***C*TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL DIMENSIONS OF THEIR IDEAS ABOUT THEIR PERSONAL FUTURE**

Many of these young people anticipated a standardised life course involving education, travel, paid employment and family. Miles (2000:114) has been amongst those who have highlighted the ‘paradoxical situation that although on the one hand, individualisation implies greater agency with individuals shaping their identities, lifestyles etc, on the other hand: the same media which bring about individualisation also bring about standardisation.’ Specifically, although the market, money, law, mobility, education etc, heighten possibilities as regards individualisation, they also effectively standardise the life course, since in order to participate in the market, you need money; in order to get money, you need a job; in order to get a job, you need education (Beck 1992).

The conventional way to analyse women’s lives has been in terms of a gender model focusing on biological or domestic events such as child bearing or rearing, while men’s lives are typically analysed in terms of a job model focusing on the labour market (Walby 1997). It has been suggested that men may have ‘a more linear, forward planning model of time’; women having ‘one which is partly cyclical and one which is spatial, involving the allocation and juggling of a multiplicity of times’ (Morgan 1996: 149). Buchner (1990:77) suggested that, amongst girls, there was a drifting away from a normative expectation of ‘being there for others’ towards claiming ‘a piece of life for oneself.’ Certainly in this study there was no evidence that girls ideas about the future simply revolved around family. Both boys and girls appeared to have a mainly linear time model, although the order in which paid work and children appeared varied. Thus, for some girls, having children was indicative of settling down and they put it after the establishment of themselves in an interesting job. Others focused first on their hopes as regards a relationship and children, and then went on to refer to the kind of job they hoped to have:

When I grow up I would like to go on to third level education. After I finish that I would like to travel the world When I have completed my travelling I would like to get an interesting job such as a Lawyer or Silicator (sic). But when I get a bit oldre (sic) I would like to settle down and have a family (Aimee, Fifth Class, First Level).

My hopes and ambitions to meet the man of my dreams. Have some children, go to college to study to be an accounting (sic) And have a happy life with my husband, children and my best friend Lindsey (Charlene, Transition Year, Second Level).

Nilsen (1999) has suggested that it is useful to conceptualise analytically the way young people think about a personal future by systematically differentiating between common sense terms such as dreams, hopes and plans. She suggested that dreams belong to a more or less timeless realm, are identified without regard to constraints, and demand no commitment from the person having these dreams. Hopes are more tangible and concrete in so far as they are seen as within the realm of the possible. Nilsen makes no reference to ambitions. Conceptually these can be seen as more specific than dreams and hopes, but less specific than plans.

Amongst these young people, in so far as dreams were referred to, they mainly focussed on travel: *'My greatest dream is to travel the world and see the pyramids of Egypt'* (Brian, Fifth Class, First Level). Indeed, as has been noted in studies of young people in a variety of countries (Brannen *et al.* 2001) travel featured strongly in their texts, linked to a desire to enjoy life to the full:

I dont want to be stuck in a job where I'd dread going to work everyday. I want to be able ... to have no regrets about my life. That's why I'd like to get the chance to experience everything and travel the world maybe someday (Carol, Transition Year, Second Level).

References were made to hopes and dreams as regards visits to Italy; Spain; America; England etc as well as to extra-terrestrial areas such as Mars: *'I'm hoping to be the first person to walk on Mars'* (Chloe, Fifth Class, First Level).. The places these young people mentioned they would like to live were mainly in the US (in Orlando, Los Angeles, and so forth) possibly reflecting the dominance of US cultural media – tv programmes, videos, and so forth – an aspect of globalisation that lies outside the

ambit of this article. In the area of dreams and hopes, there were wider references: *'When I grow up my dream would be to become an army General or else go to the north of Ireland and stop all the murders and fights between the Catholics and Prodistants (sic)'* (John, Fifth Class First Level). Indeed, hopes typically referred to occupations: *'My hopes in the future is to become leader of my country or a lawyer'* (Melissa, Fifth Class, First Level). Some young people referred generally to *'when I grow up'*; others referred to a 'social marker' (Morgan 1996) such as their 18th Birthday.

There were a range of time scales in the young people's ambitions – some simply referring to their school-days: *'My ambition ... is to become a good hard worker in school'* (Kate, Transition Year, Second Level), while others included a longer time scale: *'My ambition is ... to be a (filthy rich) lawyer when I grow up'* (Mary, Fifth Class, First Level). Some of these ambitions were stereotypical occupational ones, for example nursing, primary teaching for girls, farming, management, skilled or semi-skilled work for boys. Some (mostly boys) specifically referred to their own first hand experience of the occupations of relatives, friends or neighbours, for example, mechanics; firemen; truck drivers; farmers: *'My father drives a digger and when I grow up I want to be a digger driver or a mechanic'* (Dermot, Fifth Class, First Level). Married women's employment in Ireland did not dramatically increase until the 1990s (O'Connor 2000) so that most of their mothers were likely to have been in the home for much of their lives. Not surprisingly perhaps references to following their mothers' occupations/career paths were uncommon, although they did occasionally occur: *'When I am older I would like to be fashion designer, Own a famous factory (or shop) or be a scientist like my mum'* (Lorna, Transition Year, Second Level). As in Hannan *et al.*'s (1996) study of Leaving Cert. students, the young women anticipated that they would be in paid employment as well as having children. There was no evidence in the present study of any awareness of difficulties as regards reconciling work and family amongst boys or girls.

For many of the young people, going to university was a taken-for-granted step, arguably reflecting the level of cultural capital they had already absorbed (Bourdieu 1989). This was particularly striking since their parents were unlikely to have done so – only a quarter of young people with Leaving Certificates went to third level education twenty years ago – and because, currently, around a half of those with Leaving Certificates go on to third level education (Smyth and Hannan 2000).

Typically these young people did not use the word 'plan', although there was considerable detail in some texts (particularly the girls') which suggested the existence of plans:

I will be starting in the convent in the Year 2000. For my Junior Cert I want to study French, Business Studies and Art and for my Leaving Cert I want to study French, Business Studies and Home economics. Then I want to go to university and study Science and Physics, And hopefully get into vet school, graduate and become a vet (Mary, Fifth Class, First Level).

When I am older I would like to go to America after college but first travel the world maybe live in Venice or Berlin for a while. I would like to study science, politics and physics in college and I hope to become a Marine Biologist, Architect or an environmental lawyer (Claire, Fifth Class, First Level).

Overall then, more than three fifths of those who referred to the future referred to wishes about their personal future, whether in terms of dreams, hopes, ambitions or plans. They wanted to live life to the full, dreaming and hoping for foreign travel (even to Mars). Third Level education was frequently taken for granted. The level of detail in many of these texts – particularly the girls – was striking, with education, travel, paid employment, partner and children featuring in what could be seen as standardised, mainly linear life courses. For the most part these ideas did not appear to vary by age or gender. The shrinking of perspectives to the personal arguably reflect their age, although one might also regard this as typical of post or late modernity. However the rather linear life course can be seen as more indicative of an (implicitly male) modern perspective.

Wider focus of ideas about future (utopia; environment; technology)
Science and technology offer the possibility of control within what is seen as an increasingly uncontrollable world, where a sense of individual powerlessness is combined with global vulnerability in what Beck (1992) has described as a risk society. In contrast to what one might intuitively expect, the future was very rarely envisaged by these young people in terms of scientific or technological innovations. These featured in only a small proportion of texts (7 per cent of those who referred to the future; 4 per cent of the total sample). Given the gendered nature of technology

(Wajcman 1991; Mc Quillan and Bradley 1999) references to flying cars ‘that do not pollute the air’, solar powered cars, electric bikes. going on trips to outer space, robots, and so forth – or more prosaically to sophisticated car stereos – were predominantly made by boys: *‘I hope someday we will get the technology to go to another Galaxy, or even take people to live on the moon’* (John, Fifth Class, First Level). References to the impact of the technology on social relationships were made by young men at Second Level – and were typically in a humorous vein: *‘So what’s the future like? Do the cars still need wheels? Still got an ozone layer? Are cyborg wives cheap and efficient?’*(Jim, Transition Year, Second Level)

Other studies have shown that Irish young people have low levels of awareness of inequality; racism and so forth (Lynch and Lodge 1999). A minority (21 per cent) of those in this study who referred to the future (constituting ten cent of the total sample) referred to improved life for humanity and a better environment. The qualitative material gives a flavour of the kinds of wider focus of those – particularly girls – whose wishes for the future transcended their own lives:

I hope that everybody in the world will have a warm house, a warm bed (Emma, Fifth Class, First Level).

I hope that in the new millennium all wars will end and that animals and the environment will be savedI hope that pollution will be reduced and a lot more forests planted ... (Deirdre, Transition Year, Second Level).

Because of the time the data was collected (May 1999) there was an arguably heightened awareness of issues related to peace, and specifically to the plight of refugees: *‘I hope the kosovo refugees will live a peaceful life. I hope that there will be no more bombing any where’* (Linda, Transition Year, Second Level). Amongst the younger children, and particularly the girls, there was also some limited concern with other social issues both in Ireland and outside it: literacy, racism, unemployment, poverty, drugs, homelessness, and global inequality:

Why is it that one half of the world lives in wealth while the other lives in extreme poverty even though there is enough wealth for the whole world over, if it was shared out evenly (Mary, Transition Year, Second Level).

I hope that in the future that there would be no racism and that people would realise that we are all one in God's eyes (Aimee, Fifth Class, First Level).

In what Beck has called a 'risk society' 'The centre of risk consciousness lies not in the present, but *in the future*' (Beck 1992: 34). It is not only the actual risks but the threats of potential risks that create a sense of powerlessness and anxiety. Such feelings did not appear to be common amongst these young people. Only 6 per cent of those who referred to the future (and 4 per cent of the total sample) saw it as negative or uncertain. (This must be seen in a context where only 8 per cent of those who referred to the future – 5 per cent of the total sample – were assessed as seeing it positively). Some of the boys, especially the older boys, felt a sense global responsibility, but also of impotence, and a latent sense of despair:

The planet as a whole is dying out and it is up to us to save it. When will we learn that what we have now may not be here 20 years down the line for our children and our children's children. Pollution, nuclear waste, war all must be dealt with if we are to have any hope of survival. As it stands the human race is doomed (Ronan, Transition Year, Second Level).

By the next Milenium (sic) the world will be a shitty place. Why do I think that?' Well its been getting shittier for the past few year's and I am sure that in another thousand it will be complete and utter bollox we will have destructed ourselves to oblivion (Robert, Transition Year, Second Level).

In this, as in Nilsen's study, specific local kinds of pollution were more likely to be mentioned by the girls than the boys:

Hopetown [pseudonym] is not very clean at all. There [is] a lot of writing of names everywhere (Aisling, Fifth Class, First Level).

I like living in the country but I do hate when people throw litter around and spoil our country side (Jacinta, Fifth Class, First Level).

In contrast, the boys appeared more likely to refer to possible future global risks:

The thought of Global Warming troubles me a lot (Ian Fifth Class, First Level);

I would like to see less holes in the ozone layer and I wouldnt like to see endangered species go extinct (Luke, Fifth Class, First Level).

The interweaving of the boy's and girl's personal futures with wider social issues- whether at the level of individual charity, vocational commitment or more diffuse aspirations was also apparent:

My ambitions/hopes in life are to get enough points to study medicine, to help people who arent as fortunate as me, try to stop wars, make the peace treaty in Northern Ireland, work and try hard to get rid of things such as racism and to learn sign language (Nicole, Transition Year, Second Level).

I had tow (sic) other brother's and sister's but day (sic) died a long time ago I want to Be a Doctor so I will be able to save people's lives and mess wit stethoscopes (Morgan, Fifth Class, First Level).

Overall then, among the pupils who had a wider focus than the purely personal (21 per cent of those who referred to the future and 10 per cent of the total sample), the majority referred mainly to utopian wishes for an improved life for humanity. Only a minority (7 per cent) of those who referred to the future, thought of it in terms of technological development, with boys being most likely to do this. Finally, only a very small minority of those young people who referred to the future had negative or uncertain views of it (6 per cent of those who referred to the future). The qualitative material provided a picture of gendered concern with environmental issues, with girls being both more hopeful and more local in their concerns. Thus what is striking is the persistence of modern gendered patterns and the lack of widespread post or late modern concern with risk and/or interest in technology.

BSummary and Conclusion

In this article, we have been concerned with exploring the ideas of young Irish people about time and space, drawing on approximately 4,100 pieces of text which were written by young people aged 10 – 12 and 14 – 17 years, in Fifth Class in First Level, and in Transition Year in Second Level. For the majority of these young people, the local spatial context was important; more than three fifths of them located themselves in the area in which they lived. In the qualitative analysis, a number of discourses about the locality were identified. Some of these reflected globalised processes, such as the ‘tourist gaze’ (Bauman 1997). Others, however, reflected a much more local reality, such as the concern with farming production and the interactional reality of the local community. Overall, the importance of the local suggested that simplistic assumptions that the global had transcended the local were not supported by this study.

Secondly, various discourses about time were identified, related to their own life course; their generational positioning: their perception of themselves as part of a 90s cohort with their specific music, fashion and attitudes, to adult concepts of time (including the experience of ‘no time’), as well as control through spatial time. Perhaps not surprisingly, since the texts were written as part of the Millennium activities, the majority (62 per cent) referred to some aspect of the future, with girls and the younger children being most likely to do this. Of those who did refer to their wishes for the future, more than two thirds referred to a personal future. From the qualitative data it was clear that they thought about this future in terms of hopes and dreams as well as in terms of ambitions and plans. They mapped out their future within a standardised, more or less linear life course; education, travel, relationship, paid employment and children all being seen as part of that future. It was clear that they (especially girls) expected a great deal in terms of education to Third Level and participation in paid employment (often in the higher professions) and that they completely ignored possible difficulties as regards reconciling work and family. Finally, popular ideas that the majority of young people see the future in terms of technological developments or environmental disaster were not confirmed by this study. In this respect, as in other aspects, there was little evidence that these young people’s ideas were characteristic of those of post/late modern society.

It is important to stress that this article has focussed on a limited area, and has excluded references to, for example, young people's lifestyles (including their participation in the media, their consumption patterns, and so forth). Such aspects of their life styles may well reflect more globalising influences. Ideas about time and space may well be more resistant than these phenomena. Alternatively, it is possible that such ideas are particularly influenced by life stage rather than the wider socio-cultural context. Thus, it may be inappropriate to see young people's ideas about time and space as a litmus test of the wider social and cultural processes operating in the society.

In any case, at least as reflected in these young people's ideas, the patterns that emerged are not, for the most part, typical of late modern or post-modern society (Bauman 1991; Beck 1992; Giddens 1991; Jenks 1996). There are harbingers of the kinds of views one might expect in such a society, such as the shallowness of the time perspective, the reality of the 'tourist gaze', and the predominant focus on the personal in their ideas about the future. The dominant impression, however, is of young people who are highly focused as regards their occupational ambitions, locally embedded and with a shallow and for the most part, linear time perspective. Consequently, in so far as these young people are seen as an archetypal litmus test of the extent to which Irish society has become post-modern or late modern, the picture is not clear cut.

Notes

1. This was a prohibition on married women remaining in paid employment in a variety of contexts, including the Civil Service and second level teaching. It was removed in 1973.
2. A random sample of 10 per cent of the first 700 texts were double coded so as to assess the adequacy of the coding scheme and the reliability of the main coder.

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